

U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER WHITE SAGE  
(WLM 544  
WAGL 544  
U.S. Navy Yard Lighter YF 444)  
U.S. Coast Guard Buoy Tenders, 133' Class  
U.S. Coast Guard 1st District Base, 1 Thames Street  
Bristol vicinity  
Bristol County  
Rhode Island

HAER No. RI-56

HAER  
RI,  
1-BRIST.V,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

## U.S. COAST GUARD CUTTER WHITE SAGE

HAER No. RI-56

HAER  
RI,  
1-BRIST.V,  
1-

**RIG/TYPE OF  
CRAFT:**

Cutter, originally yard lighter

**TRADE:**

Buoy tending (government)

**OFFICIAL NUMBER:**

WLM 544 (Formerly U.S. Navy Yard Lighter YF 444; WAGL 544)

**PRINCIPAL  
DIMENSIONS:**

Length: 133'-6"  
Beam: 30'-9"  
Depth: 12'-2 7/8"

**DATE OF  
CONSTRUCTION:**

Keel laid on March 28, 1943; launched on June 9, 1943

**DESIGNER:**

U.S. Navy

**BUILDER:**

Erie Concrete & Steel Supply Company, Erie, Pennsylvania

**PRESENT OWNER  
(2000):**

Canvasback Missions, Inc., Benicia, California

**PRESENT USE  
(2000):**

Under restoration as a medical ship for health care and education for Pacific Islanders.

**SIGNIFICANCE:**

WHITE HOLLY was originally constructed as a yard lighter YF 444 for the U.S. Navy YF 257 class. This class of vessel provided logistical support to naval operations during World War II. Following the war, the U.S. Coast Guard acquired eight of these vessels to perform service for their aids to navigation as buoy tenders.

**PROJECT  
INFORMATION:**

The United States Coast Guard Recording Program is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. The HAER program is administered by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic

American Engineering Record Division (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, E. Blaine Cliver, Chief. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Buoy Tenders, 133' Class Recording Project was sponsored during 2000 and 2001 by the USCG, Sheri Imel, liaison.

The project was prepared under the direction of HAER Maritime Program Manager Todd Croteau. The team consisted of Howard Jefferson (University of the District of Columbia) and Pete Brooks, architects; Candace Clifford and Kevin Foster, historians; and Jet Lowe, photographer. Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, NCSHPO, edited the report.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE U.S. COAST GUARD BUOY TENDERS, 133' CLASS, SEE:

HAER No. DC-56	U.S. Coast Guard Buoy Tenders, 133' Class
HAER No. AL-187	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter WHITE PINE
HAER No. LA-14	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter WHITE SUMAC
HAER No. LA-15	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter WHITE HOLLY
HAER No. MA-150	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter WHITE HEATH
HAER No. ME-63	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter WHITE LUPINE
HAER No. RI-56	U.S. Coast Guard Cutter WHITE SAGE

## DESCRIPTION

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) WHITE SAGE was constructed at the Erie Concrete & Steel Supply Company in Erie, Pennsylvania. According to her "Ship's Characteristics Card," dated November 21, 1966, WHITE SAGE was 133'-6" in overall length, 32' in length between perpendiculars, 30'-9" in extreme beam, 12'-2 7/8" in depth of hold, 7'-2" in draft forward fully loaded, and 5'-6" in draft forward with a light load. She is listed as having two masts, the forward mast being 57' and the aft 36'. The vessel displaced 476 tons and had a maximum speed of 10 knots fully loaded. Her hull, decks, bulkheads, and frames were constructed of steel, while her superstructure was steel and wood.

Auxiliary boats in 1966 included a motor cargo boat, dinghy, and three seven-man rubber lifeboats. In 1966, she had her original diesel engines, which were opposed piston Fairbanks-Morse Diesels built by Union Diesel Engine Company, in Oakland, California. The engines had two propellers, 300 horsepower each, and two auxiliary diesel generators. In 1971, WHITE SAGE underwent a major renovation at the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Yard in Curtis Bay, Maryland. Her machinery was modernized in 1975. These modifications brought about many changes, including updated equipment to improve her aids to navigation (ATON) capabilities.

Before decommissioning in 1999, WHITE SAGE's length, beam, and draft remained the same.<sup>1</sup> The engines in 1999 were Caterpillar D353 Diesel reduction (4 to 1), for each screw.<sup>2</sup> The screws were constant pitch propellers. WHITE SAGE and other ships built and later modified at Erie (including WHITE SUMAC, WHITE HEATH, and WHITE LUPINE) had a quiet room for the engine room controls.

WHITE SAGE had an oily water separator unique among the ships of the class. In 1999, she still had the original electric engine-augmented shaft and cable steering system. She had a chill water air conditioning system (essentially radiators in boxes), which could also use hot water from the hot water boiler in the engine room. Air conditioning for the crew's berthing area was requested by the commander of the First District in a 1971 memo.

WHITE SAGE had a heavy-duty A-frame boom, which replaced the original single mast, used to handle buoys and anchors. There was a weather deck broken by a topgallant forecastle raised about 4' above the main deck. The open foredeck was surrounded by a partial bulwark and pipe rails. The main deck continued at the same level aft through the superstructure onto the small fantail area, aft of the superstructure.

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<sup>1</sup> Found in ship's files.

<sup>2</sup> The following description is based on Kevin Foster's notes from site visit, 30 September 1999.

The superstructure consisted of a single-deck-height house surmounted by a raised pilothouse, and commander's stateroom forward. The engine room casing extended up through the top of the house, topped by skylights, with the funnel amidships forward. Hoses for dewatering pumps were contained in plastic tubing mounted on the centerline above the engine room skylights.

The controls for the boom were located forward of the pilothouse, immediately behind the mainmast and boom. The winches for operation of the cargo boom were located in the forward section of the house.

The crew's mess of WHITE SAGE was remodeled in the 1980s entirely in stainless steel. Her galley is athwartships aft of the crews mess. The tables and chairs have been replaced by booths.

All of the class had new bridges and bridge controls installed, reportedly each unique. Some remnants of original technology remained, however, such as the telephone communication system.

WHITE SAGE had upside-down "J"-shaped davits to starboard, which were hand-operated. A single angle-iron davit was mounted forward of the funnel to port.

The hull was longitudinally framed with deep web frames at about 5' intervals.

## HISTORY

WHITE SAGE was commissioned on May 29, 1944, as YF 444, a U.S. Navy lighter. Her keel was laid at the Erie Concrete & Steel Supply Co., Erie, Pennsylvania, on March 28, 1943. She was launched two months later on June 9, 1943. After World War II, YF 444 and seven sister vessels were acquired by the USCG in 1946. The fifth vessel in her class, WHITE SAGE was commissioned into the Coast Guard as WAGL 544 on August 9, 1947.

Once commissioned into the Coast Guard, her colors were switched from Navy grey to Coast Guard black and white. WHITE SAGE was originally homeported in Bristol, Rhode Island, where she primarily served aids to navigation (ATON) in the First Coast Guard District. In 1950, her homeport was changed to Woods Hole, Massachusetts, also within the First Coast Guard District. In 1988, her homeport was changed back to Bristol.

WHITE SAGE was responsible for 275 ATON from Chatham to Block Island, which included the waters of Nantucket Sound, Buzzards Bay, and Narragansett Bay. At the end of her service, WHITE SAGE took over an additional 160 buoys from the USCGC REDWOOD, extending its

service area out to New Haven, Connecticut.<sup>3</sup> WHITE SAGE not only transported freight and vehicles to Coast Guard units in the islands of Nantucket and Cuttyhunk, but also serviced the lights in Buzzards Bay.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to her ATON duties, WHITE SAGE performed many assists and rescues and sometimes acted as an icebreaker. Notable rescue missions included salvaging a capsized boat near Nantucket Island in 1952; providing assistance following the collision between two motor vessels, FRANCISVILLE and LUCKENBACK, in July 1959; and assisting the disabled tug, M. MORAN, two miles east of Cape Cod Canal on March 4, 1960.<sup>5</sup>

On January 29, 1959, WHITE SAGE was requested to clear a passage through the ice to East Greenwich Cove, Rhode Island. Fishing boats were stuck, some damaged and sunk. WHITE SAGE routinely cleared channels after severe storms or nor'easters, including Hurricane Bob in 1991, when the eye of the storm passed directly over Woods Hole and disrupted the entire aids to navigation system. WHITE SAGE was crucial in keeping open shipping lanes on Narragansett Bay during severe ice conditions during the winter of 1993-1994, ensuring delivery of heating oil to homes in the affected area.<sup>6</sup>

WHITE SAGE participated as a Command and Control platform in many marine events including the America's Cup regattas. In addition to serving as a platform to provide support for the small patrol craft, she maintained the security zone for the race course. Before retirement, WHITE SAGE served as the Command and Control platform for the Patrol Commander for the Quonset, Rhode Island airshow in 1995. WHITE SAGE played an important role in pollution response, assisting in the North Cape oil spill cleanup off Point Judith.<sup>7</sup>

WHITE SAGE was decommissioned on June 7, 1996. She was replaced with the first keeper-class 175' tender, IDA LEWIS. In 1999, WHITE SAGE was transferred, along with the WHITE HOLLY, to the Canvasback Missions, Inc. This organization will be working with the Center

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<sup>3</sup> "Welcome Aboard-USCGC White Sage WLM-544, 1943-1996," program for decommissioning ceremony, 7 June 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Memo dated 3 January 1950, from C.L. Jordan, Commanding Officer, Coast Guard Depot, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, to Captain W.B. Chiswell, ATON Section.

<sup>5</sup> Robert L. Scheina, *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft 1946-1990* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 133.

<sup>6</sup> PA3 Weatherall, fax dated 4 August 1998, containing Coast Guard Cutter WHITE SAGE history, located in ship's file in U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office, Washington, D.C.

<sup>7</sup> Weatherall fax.

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for Disease Control, the National Institute for Health, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the government of the Marshall Islands, and using the ships primarily for health care and education.

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Memo from C.L. Jordan, Commanding Officer, Coast Guard Depot, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, to Captain W.B. Chiswell, ATON Section, 3 January 1950.

PA 3 Weatherall, fax, 4 August 1998. Located in ship's file in U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office, Washington, D.C.

Scheina, Robert L. *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft 1946-1990*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990.

Site visit notes by Kevin Foster, 30 September 1999.

"Welcome Aboard-USCGC White Sage WLM-544," decommissioning ceremony program, 7 June 1996.